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Sources of "Public Reason" in Europe: Perspectives from Theological Ethics

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Abstract: Welcoming the turn toward including normative conceptions of the human into the remit of economics, this paper compares philosophical frameworks that guide principles such as dignity and justice as one source of theological ethics. Recent political crises show the importance of analyzing the public sphere with which Christian ethics in its various approaches interacts. The place given to religions in Rawls's and Habermas's concepts of "public reason" is compared with Ricoeur's understanding of religions as cofounding traditions. They can contribute to a necessary exchange of memories, also of conflict and conquest, inspired by the undelivered hopes of their own founding memories, precluding triumphalism and fostering "intellectual solidarity" (Hollenbach).

Keywords: Public reason • Religions • Translation • Ethics of memory • Solidarity

The aim of the following analyses is to show how an understanding of Christian ethics that is committed to dialog with different traditions and views in civil society deals with the source of the "normative human": with specific philosophical accounts of human nature and agency. This is performed in three steps: 1) outlining normative conceptions of the human and their significance for debates on future directions of pluralist societies; 2) guiding anthropological frameworks implied in three different understandings of philosophical ethics, and in one model of Christian social ethics; 3) outlining different conceptions of "public" and religions in the public sphere proposed by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas compared to Paul Ricoeur's view of religions as "cofounding" traditions of a society, availing of "enunciative" as distinct from "institutional authority," and fostering practical self-understandings (Ricoeur 2007). The role that falls into an ethics of memory is treated in

conclusion. In Ricoeur's analysis, it is set to reinvigorate the European project based on distinct histories of foundation, once the contribution of unrealized hopes and betrayed promises is taken into account.

1. Normative conceptions of the human as one source of Christian ethics

While the individual human sciences, among them economics, sociology, psychology, and history, pursue their enquiries based on their own methodologies, a question has emerged that cuts across all disciplines: what philosophical anthropologies or normative conceptions of the human are guiding them, and which human capacities do they assume? How has the human endowment with self-reflection that manifests itself in philosophical,

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theological, and ethical questioning been exercised in different eras and cultures? The project of relating economics to different visions of human flourishing and morality and of investigating the role of religion in them is a promising development. Being invited to reflect on normative sources and the worlds of meaning that support them enables exchanges about visions of communal and personal life that are implied in these individual disciplines but not always analyzed.

In its task of specifying the Christian message in relation to moral challenges posed by contemporary societies, theological ethics is able to draw on four sources: 1) its biblical foundations, 2) their histories of interpretation, 3) philosophical conceptions of the normative human, as expressed in schools of practical reasoning, and 4) the enquiries and results of the natural, social, and cultural sciences.[1] Concrete judgments in ethics are the end point of a reflected course of enquiry in which these sources provide aspects that need to be united in a practical perspective. Each of these sources calls for interpretation. In view of several approaches in which Christian ethics has been unfolded, justification is also required for the tradition of ethical thinking chosen. Key terms such as justice and charity and dignity and solidarity receive specific accentuations or even different meanings from their frameworks, be it virtue ethics, natural law, autonomy, or a foundation on worship.[2] Each

of them has a distinct outline of what it considers to be key Christian values, and debates about their compatibility or competition mark Christian ethics as much as theology. The history of Christian thinking has been one of the interpretations of the original message of redemption through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as given in the New Testament accounts, and its transformation in its encounter with the questions and intellectual streams of different eras. Subsequent theologians have built on or revised the new expressions that the biblical proclamation found in taking up the categories of the periods they inhabited and shaped. This history of translations into changing horizons of self-understanding, corrections, and new proposals is an instructive manifestation of diverse inculturations. At the same time, the issue of what holds this plurality together is unavoidable for its both theoretical and practical unfolding. There are many places where several interpretations call for hermeneutical decisions to be taken and justified. For example, can Jesus' ministry and calling be summed up in the key statement of his virtue of peacefulness?[3] How do God's justice and mercy relate to each other, and how does this shape Christian responses to the message of salvation? (Ansorge 2009) Is human agency completely dependent on divine grace or does it need to be spelt out in categories of human freedom also in its relation to God? (Beinert 2007; Greiner 2011). Finally, based on a careful weighing of arguments on what the identity of Christianity consists in, Christian social ethics can and must come up with answers and propose argued courses of action. As a shorthand formulation for the intersection of theoretical and empirical research with specific normative principles, the call to let economics be guided by a Christian view of the person can be defended; however, at the same time, it should be clear that there are no shortcuts available from the Bible, the Christian tradition, or definitive doctrinal statements to solutions for current dilemmas. Only if its biblical, theological, and philosophical argumentations as well as the social and natural sciences used are accounted for, Christian ethics is able to contribute to inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives. Since its horizon, the Kingdom of God, reaches beyond the churches, it is called to dialog with the perspectives of others. Internal criteria which this theological discipline has to answer to include its selection of biblical sources as well as its own theological consistency. Striving to give a systematic

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1   The role of these sources in the "quadrilateral" test that found in John Wesley and extending from methodism to Roman Catholic and Lutheran authors such as Robert J. Daly and James M. Gustafson is accepted across different approaches to Christian ethics (Cahill 1985, pp.4-8, 12-13). The author has outlined the hermeneutical questions involved in these sources and their integration in moral judgments in "Hermeneutics and the Sources of Theological Ethics," in *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church: The Plenary Papers from Padua*, eds. J. Keenan (2007), New York, Continuum, pp.167-175, 292-293, and will discuss them further *in Approaches to Theological Ethics. Sources, Traditions, Visions* (2019), London/New York, Bloomsbury.

2   Virtue ethics has been developed both as an alternative and as a complement to autonomous ethics, as a comparison of Hauerwas and Mieth shows (Hauerwas 1981) and the critique by Wils and Mieth (1992, pp.182-198). Natural law has been spelt out in a "classical" and a "revisionist" format which takes the insight on board that interpretations of nature have changed historically (Gula 1991, pp.369-391; Pope 2001, pp.77-93). The autonomy approach to Christian ethics argues with Kant that the problem of justification is distinct from the problem of meaning that moral agents encounter. Human beings can be moral without being religious. What is added by a faith perspective to the unconditional recognition of every human being that is demanded by morality are five significant dimensions: motivation, intensification by seeing Christ in the afflicted other, heuristics of discovering of what is morally relevant, integration, and relativisation of the moral which is subordinated to the human need and capability to be redeemed (Mieth 1982, pp.32-39; Auer 1971). The foundation of Christian ethics on communal "worship" is a further elaboration of the communitarian framework of virtue ethics, now focused on the

celebration of the memory of Christ's sacrifice (Hauerwas and Wells 2004, pp.1-12, and subsequent chapters).

3   A critique of Hauerwas's virtue-ethical interpretation of Jesus is given in Fergusson (1998, pp.48-79). An exegetical account that identifies counterarguments to casting New Testament ethics as virtue ethics is given in Barton (1999, pp.12-22).

account is borne out by indicating its relationship with previous approaches, avoiding eclecticism, and taking on the work of reconstruction (Meeks 1998, pp.171-181; Deidun 1998, pp.3-64).[4] By making its premises clear, it is able to relate its interpretation of the core of Christianity and its contemporary consequences both to other traditions and positions in the Christian churches and to non-Christian positions that contribute to civic debate on concrete issues.

Matters discussed controversially in civic and global fora include the following: how security can be provided without undermining democratic freedoms, among them the liberal right to privacy (Klöcker 2017)[5]; how freedom of religion and freedom of expression relate to each other; how European principles and values, as enshrined in human rights and international treaties, can be sustained by civic engagement and local institutions, in the face of uneven burden sharing, as in the refugee crisis (Heimbach-Steins 2017)[6]; how the scientific research result that global warming is due to human action can be converted into changes in economies and individual lifestyles; how machine learning will affect workplaces of the future, what role work is assumed to have for human dignity; and what transnational political structures and institutions are needed to maintain political agency in the face of the power of global corporations able to force states to grant exceptions and to evade tax liabilities[7];

whether competitive societies led to measure progress in terms of individual success under conditions of scarcity and antagonism should allow future parents to use genetic enhancement technologies to optimize their offspring at the preimplantation stage: does such intervention breach the symmetry between the generations and constitute domination, violating the unconditionality of recognition in the anticipatory fostering of their child's personal freedom, or does it give this future individual the best possible starting conditions?[8]

In view of such divergent argumentations and policy proposals in key areas of individual and political life, it is evident that cultural backgrounds and worldviews will play a major role in debates on future stages of advanced and complex societies. Since these are wedded for their future prosperity to scientific and technological change, they are in danger of allowing *faits accomplis* to be created by unregulated interests. Against such imposition, it is necessary to harness everyday lived convictions and historically achieved standards and to find public spaces that enable such debate.

2. The link between anthropology and ethics as indicated in key terms

"Anthropologies" or conceptions of the human are often tacit assumptions that accompany political or economic decision-making. They feed into whole programs for human resources and for change management, but they mostly remain implicit and unexamined. Social ethics is a discipline which includes giving an account of the anthropological premises that carry various schools of ethics. These, in competition, share one basic starting point: human beings have the capacity to reflect on their own actions and thoughts. The following brief overview of three philosophical and one theological tradition with their key terms elucidates how systems of ethics are connected with elementary anthropological assumptions and how they view religion in relation to ethics.

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4 On the sequence of approaches in Catholic moral theology in the context of the move from neo-scholastic to biblically inspired ethics (MacNamara 1985; Pröpper 1991, pp.230-235; Sykes 1984).

5 Katharina Klöcker concluded that both are at different levels and that it is misleading to construct it as a situation of choice between the two. A "model of a mutual enabling of competing values" is called for, instead of balancing and opting for "the lesser evil", since "permitting the negative consequence could prove counterproductive for the realization of the value that is actually being pursued."

6 Daniel Bogner and Hansjörg Schmid pointed out how a different level of inclusion of the established Islamic communities emerged by forging new links with local and communal authorities for giving refugees access to housing and education: Bogner, "Wechselseitige Irritation. Kann Religion eine Integrationsresource sein?" (pp.149-162) and Schmid, "Hindernis oder Ressource? Die Rolle des Islams für die Integration von Flüchtlingen" (pp.163-174). Similarly, the initiatives with which regional chambers of commerce and Christian churches from central levels of leadership to local parishes have responded to this challenge since September 2015 illustrate how a task that seems overwhelming and causing major conflict can call forth extraordinary resources of good will. Cf. Wustmann, Hildegard, "Grenzen ermessen und Aufbrüche wagen. Pfarrgemeinden als Orte der Integration" (pp.175-187).

7 A different scale has been reached by the turn from the framework of national economies to globalisation, as Anzenbacher (1997, pp.77-85) already perceived in *Christliche Sozialethik*, and Hoffmann in "Wirtschaftsethik" (2003, pp.281-292). Reflecting the need to add the area of finance ethics to business ethics is publications based on dual competencies such as by Emunds (2014), *Politische Wirtschaftsethik globaler Finanzmärkte*. In privileging developments

that take on board the limits of sustainability, investment decisions taken by business leaders can be seen to be more forward looking and trustworthy than the timeframe of the electoral cycle and ideological factors to which politicians respond. The disagreement of businesses with the American President's decision to leave the Paris Agreement of December 2015 indicates this divergence and interest in taking a longer-term perspective.

8 While such technologies are not yet available and could only be developed through clinical trials, that is, allowing for the use of human subjects in enhancement experimentation, the cultural debate already exists, as the opposite perspectives of ethicists in the Rawls tradition and Habermas show (Buchanan et al. 2001; Habermas 2003).

Utilitarianism sees human needs as foundational for ethics and measures the "good" by the consequences of an action for improving the happiness of the greatest possible number of people. By taking "needs" as its starting point, and concern for the majority of people affected as a normative criterium, it offers an empirically based guide for action that can justify giving priority to global challenges such as food security, clean water, and protection against climate change. It has been criticized, however, for the lack of a criterium of distribution in its social principle which fails to protect basic rights of individuals and minorities against a majority.[9] John Stuart Mill pointed out its compatibility with New Testament values. Yet, it is clear that "needs" are judged at an empirical level and that they are also a revised pleasure principle which distinguishes quality from quantity fails to reach the standards set by Aristotelian and Kantian ethics: the reasoned orders of priority necessary for a flourishing life or the fragile connection of freedom in its need for recognition by other free human beings to happiness and meaning.

Aristotelian ethics begins with the human being as an *animal rationale* that is social and political and is therefore oriented toward a shared community or polis in which it can have a voice and where its education in virtues takes place. Current theological adoptions of a virtue-ethical framework take over the community-based understanding of practical reasoning and replace "polis" with "church" as the context of socialization in values. There is no internal necessity, however, to move from a civic to a religious framework or to consider a religious dimension in the realization of ethics. Neo-Aristotelian and neo-Hegelian proposals build on the internal resources of a community, the recognition among its members, and the ability of its ethos to provide what is necessary for their identity formation.

Kantian morality takes the capability for moral reflection as its starting point and makes it clear that this cannot be proven or refuted from an objectivizing position; it can only become a reality through personal reflection and interpretation. Freedom could well be an illusion, as Kant admitted, but it is equally impossible to prove by theoretical reason that we are totally determined, and so the internal consciousness of being capable of morality is the most basic datum for his idea of practical reason. The everyday consciousness of having been able to act otherwise reveals to Kant that "good will" is the foundational human capacity, despite the "penchant for evil." "Good will" is not to be confused with rationality or intelligence which is at the cognitive level of purposive reason

(*Verstand*) and ultimately subject to the limits of pure reason (*Vernunft*). For practical reason, by contrast, the limit lies somewhere else, outside of what human beings can reconcile: in the contradiction (or "antinomy") that good moral action, without ulterior motives or tacit self-interest, and the happiness due to such a person are not connected. People whose intentions are led by justice are often the ones who suffer; no other philosopher, observed Ricoeur, has given as much weight to the role of hope (Ricoeur 1995b, pp.203-2016) for being able to continue on a path that respects and supports the other as an end in herself or himself, with no safety net if this respect is not reciprocated. Against the experience that offers of peace are turned down, that anticipatory and generous invitations are exploited for self-interest, Kant declared it reasonable to base one's hope in the success of moral action in God who has created a world open to unselfish initiative, and not ending in absurdity. Such subjective reasonable (*vernünftig*) faith has the status of a "postulate," not of knowledge.

While it has become clear that these three approaches to ethics are based on different key assumptions, they still share the view that human beings are not just antagonistic agents and that sociability is an inherent human feature. Even if utilitarianism does not pay attention required to the basic human rights of individuals, its social principle is one of recognition. This assumption is denied in approaches in which the struggle for survival against hostile fellow human beings is the basic starting point, as for Thomas Hobbes and later on for Nietzsche. Not only these positions turn what is part of human ambivalence, the role of negativity in relation to others, into a single basic given, denying the equally observable orientation toward the other's benefit but also they assume a vitalist basis for all human pursuits, a mere striving for material survival in a hostile nature and in the face of enemies, instead of situating the struggle at the level of something foundational for human beings, namely the recognition of who they are (Ricoeur 2005, pp.161-175). The views of economies and markets will differ according to the model chosen for relating human inter-subjectivity and reflexivity. In a purely antagonistic model, competition counts as a shorthand for life, and the idea that it is a means for the efficient provision of basic goods, but serving the aim of a participative organization based on freedom, equality, and generosity, is alien.

As an example of an anthropology developed within a Catholic ecclesial framework that has been able to assimilate major changes in its view of the individual, of political resistance, and of the church organization itself,[10] the author wants to conclude with Catholic social

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9   An excellent explanation of the sequence of its guiding principles and their critiques are given in Anzenbacher (1992, pp.31-42).

10 An epoch-making change consists in the move from an objectivizing understanding of truth to the truth of the person, as evident in the

teaching. It has proved to be coherent but still flexible, providing resources for judging developments at the workplace and critiquing theories of justice that do not recognize the resource for cultural enrichment which different traditions can provide in a society; it also opens up a transnational, universalist horizon. Catholic social thought can contribute a sphere of resonance to other traditions and movements with their heuristic potential for spotting problematic directions. The advantage of outlining its basic principles is that it offers a recognizable body of underlying key reference points that are translatable into policy proposals. These are further specified through the insights resulting from the individual sciences analyzing business and organization, economics, and political systems.

As a case of what Rawls called "comprehensive doctrines," which can be philosophical or religious, Catholic social thought offers an example of a tradition to which others can relate at the level of some shared principles or policy proposals. It is useful to see how key terms such as "dignity" or "subsidiarity" are understood within this framework and able to be tested against other interpretations. From its background in biblical monotheism, based on the Genesis designation of each human as being made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), it understands the principle of dignity as the singularity of each person called by God.[11] A second principle is justice as a structural criterium required from the institutions of the political and the economic systems, not merely as a voluntary and optional initiative demanded by fellow citizens (Verstraeten 2011, pp.92-102). The third principle, solidarity, extends from social systems, such as health insurance and pensions, to the mentality of citizens, a factor which the state cannot itself create and that needs cultural and religious traditions to foster and model it. The fourth principle, subsidiarity, has been adopted as the basis for the distribution of responsibilities in the EU, together with federalism, as its two "architectural principles" were stated in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. It received its first formulation, however, in Catholic social teaching, in the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* of 1931, as the position that government "should, by its very nature, provide help (*subsidium*) to members of the body social, it should never destroy or

absorb them" (p.79). The distinction of different levels and defense of a bottom-up approach that leaves decisions first to agents at grassroot level can be connected with the insight that justice needs to be distinguished into different "spheres."[12] Distinct levels of organization with their own measures of excellence are to be facilitated, not suppressed by the state, since the lower levels allow for greater direct participation. Overall, the guiding anthropology is one of self-motivation and participation. Human beings in their dignity and uniqueness are seen to be striving of their own accord toward the good, bringing initiative and the desire for competence to their work.[13] Subsidiarity entails the recognition that a forum is needed in which citizens can work out their convictions on the future shape of their societies, local, national, continental, and global.

3. Conceptions of "public" and religion in the public sphere

The diversity of schools of thinking already within the shared backdrop of Western philosophical and theological ethics is further enlarged by the narratives, symbolic worlds, and normative concepts of neighbors and fellow workers from non-European cultures. The task of constituting a joint public sphere from different subsections and linguistic as well as intellectual traditions thus becomes even more demanding. By comparing three conceptions of "public" and of the space, they give to religion, both the problems and the possible resources and goals should become clearer.

3.1. An "overlapping consensus" as the maximal form of agreement in a pluralist society (Rawls)

One effect of Rawls's *Theory of Justice* (1971) as "fairness" has been to replace utilitarianism as the hitherto most widespread approach in English-speaking social ethics. Its success can be explained by its insistence on basic human rights that are due to each individual in his or her "inviolability."[14] A new stage of cultural analysis

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Second Vatican Council's turn from the Catholic Church's previous condemnation of religious freedom to its acceptance as a core principle in *Dignitatis humanae*.

11 This theological foundation is universal and applies to every human being, independently of empirical features. The philosopher Nagl-Docekal pointed out that how this understanding is being narrowed down and replaced with a role of understanding which is exactly not in keeping with human dignity when Catholic magisterial statements put forward a specific interpretation of a distinct dignity of women (Nagl-Docekal 2012, pp.155-187).

12 Ricoeur referred to Walzer and Boltanski/L. Thévenot in *Reflections on the Just*, 6.

13 This guiding assumption contrasts sharply with systems introduced in work environments that seem to assume that employees would not engage in work unless they are being monitored (MacNamara, 2009).

14 It is based on two foundations: the first is "contractual" and the second is "drawing on existing values called 'considered convictions'." The renewed version of the contract tradition offered by Rawls includes the famous construct of an "original position," where the members agree on the basic principles of their future society behind a "veil

is marked by his *Political Liberalism* (1993): the significance of "pluralism" has now emerged. The new problem is how to achieve stability in the continuing quest for justice built on liberty and equality in the face of diverse world orientations and systems of belief. The solution offered is to aim for an "overlapping consensus" from different background traditions. While the reasons for endorsing this consensus on concrete matters remain in the individual worldviews which are called "comprehensive doctrines," areas of overlap at least among "reasonable" traditions can be identified.

On the one hand, this approach takes the challenge seriously that a democratic society consists of citizens shaped by a diversity of long-standing and well-developed communities with their intellectual and institutional resources. Consensus has to be worked for and reasonable disagreements are to be expected since thinking people can come to different conclusions with good reasons. On the other hand, Rawls's outline contains a number of premises that have been questioned: 1) is it true that there is no shared basis but only a segment that overlaps when viewed from above? Is an observer's position adequate when it comes to ethics, or are we implicated, thus participants who bring evaluations of their own into the forging of such a consensus? From a Kantian position, we are thinkers and agents who share an ability that has to be identified, namely the capability for morality without which no such overlaps could occur. 2) For Rawls, however, different schools of philosophical thinking – Kant, utilitarianism, Hegel, and others – are themselves "comprehensive doctrines." This assumption is profoundly culturalist, submitting philosophy as well as the limits of cultures and denying its distinct status as a discipline that analyzes premises, exchanges arguments, critiques conclusions, and performances that are made possible by the reflective capacity of human beings to investigate truth claims; it

is at a different level than cultures in their lived coherence. By placing religious worldviews and philosophical enquiries at the same level, society seems to consist only of enclaves of internal communication between members sharing the same convictions whose validity claims beyond their own circle, however, cannot be debated. At the same time, Rawls must be assuming some capacity for translation when he conceded in 1997 his "proviso": those citizens of religious and other worldviews "in due course" are to give equivalent "proper political" reasons for the positions inspired by their personal convictions.[15] They are thus somewhat bilingual. What level then is fit to be called "public," therefore able to generate binding policies for all? Rawls reserved the term "public reason," which for Kant was a pursuit that every human being can engage in, for the legislative and judicative venues of democratic decision-making, Parliament and Supreme Court, and their elected or appointed officials. The deliberations and initiatives of citizens, universities, religious communities, and similar bodies are called "nonpublic" by Rawls, as distinct from "private." What gets lost in this restriction of "public" to state institutions and their officeholders is what Habermas called the "informal public sphere," citizens discussing and evaluating state and society, where they spot problems and clashes of policies with historically achieved standards, e.g., of protecting human dignity in cases that officeholders might never become aware of. What Rawls designated as "background cultures" has a critical function in Habermas's theory of democracy: a core legitimizing role that can be withheld or granted to justify a measure. An equally exchange-oriented, but more hermeneutically conscious, critique comes from David Hollenbach's Catholic social thought perspective. He welcomed several understandings of the human beings which are present and reshaped in different cultures. For him, they are "eminently public domains," pointing out that such "background cultures" play "a formative role in what is politically reasonable." Thus, rather than being tasked to translate on their own, each community should be envisioned as being intellectually curious about the guiding orientations of others. Seeking "to understand those with a different vision of the good life is already a form of solidarity even when disagreement continues to exist" (Hollenbach 2002, pp.149-170, 168, 138). A more encompassing understanding of a religion's concepts of transcendence and immanence, of human individuality and community, of suffering, freedom, and sin, and of nature and history is

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of ignorance." For a theory of social ethics, it is unusual that Rawls tried to "avoid any controversial ethical elements" and supposed the agents to be "mutually disinterested" (TJ, pp.13-14). Game theory is brought in to calculate the optimal set of principles for all conceivable circumstances each member might find himself in. The insertion of specific qualities which put into question the premise of ethics that humans can act out of good will has been a matter of intricate debate on both ethical and logical terms. The Kantian scholar Onora O'Neill critiqued the confusion of "abstraction," which is unproblematic, with "idealisation," adding specific qualities to the assumed agents, such as their interpretation as selfish or risk averse or intent to maximize their assets. The author has discussed her critique and those of Höffe and Ricoeur in *Religion and Public Reason. A Comparison of the Positions of John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur* (2014, pp.9-13). The morally negative addition that the agents are self-interested is then counteracted by the "veil" which leads them to opt for the most beneficial basic structure if they were placed in the worst scenario.

15 Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited", published first in 1997, repr. In *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp.129-180, 153-54).

gained in its coherence; ethical aspirations and moral directives can be assessed from this wider canvas. By locating the mutual enquiry at the level of flourishing life, and not, as the next thinker, Habermas, at the level of discourse on morality about what is universalizable, Hollenbach's "intellectual solidarity" engages first of all with the domain of meaning rather than obligation. Exploring what is unique to another culture is his entry point, as it is for Ricoeur and for the theologian David Tracy who propose a wider framework to Habermas, "dialog" as more encompassing than "discourse," as will be seen in the second model.

3.2. Reason as communicative and the public sphere in need of religious contributions on pathologies and an unfailed life (Habermas)

In keeping with Kant's urging of the "public use of reason," as in his epoch-making essay, "What is Enlightenment?" (1784), "public" for Habermas is linked to morally reflective agents and an emerging civic sphere of deliberation. In his discussion with Rawls in 1995, before Rawls offered a "wider" view, he critiqued Rawls on a number of Kantian points: on the priority of negative private rights over joint democratic self-legislation and on restricting the critical dimension of "public reason" by tying it to accepted "political values" such as "civility." For Habermas as analyst of the origins of the public sphere and subsequent discourse ethicist, the normative idea that citizens are authors and addressees of laws has to be guided. This is what "autonomy" implies, and the path to such laws is discourse about what interests, maxims, or policy proposals can be justified as meeting the criterium of universalization, of taking into account everyone affected. In his recent publications since 2001, Habermas specified how the resources of religions can be made available for civic debate. With their sensitivities for pathologies and their visions of an unfailed life, religions can aid the goal of keeping the "unfinished project" of the enlightenment from "derailing": "An uncontrolled modernization of society... could certainly corrode democratic bonds and undermine the form of solidarity on which the democratic state depends even though it cannot enforce it. Then, the very constellation that Böckenförde has in mind would transpire, namely, the transformation of the citizens of prosperous and peaceful liberal societies into isolated, self-interested monads who use their individual liberties exclusively against one another like weapons" (Habermas 2008, p.107).

On the one hand, religions belong to worldviews; the basis of legislation, however, is what can be universalized, judged by the morality each one is capable of as a human being. Therefore, policy proposals directly inspired by religions do not pass the bar of being "general" and "accessible" to all. Nor do they have to, since communicative reason takes over this task at the level of discourse. But religions and philosophical traditions are nevertheless not foreign to each other for three reasons: 1) historically, they have a joint origin in the axial age, based on Karl Jaspers' claim that human self-understanding changed profoundly during a few centuries around 2500 BCE, when the Jewish prophets, the Buddha, Socrates, and the great philosophical systems appeared; 2) regarding human competences, with George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, the capability for "mutual perspective taking" explains why another culture is not just alien. Unlike Rawls, Habermas identified the pragmatic condition of the possibility of the understanding needed for translation (Habermas 1998, pp.57-58)[16]; 3) from the history of Western thinking, as he pointed out again in his recent reception speeches of the Erasmus Award 2013 and the Kluge Prize, shared with Charles Taylor in 2015, postmetaphysical thinking itself owes its departure from metaphysics to changes wrought by Christianity to key Greek philosophical categories of thinking. Therefore, translation is possible not just in principle, but already worked out in numerous examples of key terms of personal and political self-understanding. In addition, democracy is seen as a dynamic process and a learning project also between adversarial perspectives.

As a public intellectual, in his recent analyses of the political crisis in Europe, among them reactions to immigration, Habermas identified a conflict between "two solidarities," one between fellow nationals and the other with fellow human beings in vulnerable situations. It seems obvious that religions with a universalist horizon of a creator God of all human beings, whose salvific will include every individual, would be immediate spiritual partners urging their adherents to be hospitable to the new arrivals from war-torn countries. A dimension that is underdeveloped in the political writings of Habermas, however, is reflection on the resources that will support the next stage of the process: the practical self-understandings that emerge from the symbolic expressions, stories and ethical models, memories, and institutions of a culture. In a recent analysis of David Tracy's enquiries to the

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16 "Discourse Ethics rests on the intuition that the application of the principle of universalization, properly understood, calls for a joint process of 'ideal role taking'… Under the pragmatic presuppositions of an inclusive and non-coercive rational discourse between free and equal participants everyone is required to take the perspective of everyone else and thus to project herself into the understandings of self and world of all others."

format of Habermas's project already in 1988, Andreas Telser pointed out that the Chicago theologian identifies as a lacuna Habermas's neglect of cultural specifics, while these enable an understanding of the world without which normative discourse would not be possible (Telser 2017, pp.182-196). One key argument for including the realm of cultural expression is that current ardent controversies in the public sphere relate exactly to widely divergent understandings of a "flourishing life." This poses the question whether a moral debate and legal regulation are needed or whether differences can be tolerated and exempted from having to conform to the legal framework these religious communities would find intrusive. The limit between acceptable varieties of pursuing a flourishing or unfailed life, and what needs legal control, is not straightforward. Habermas named the conditions that religions have to accept (Habermas 2008, p.137), but the work of striving for understanding the horizons of another culture or religion needs a different, namely a hermeneutical type of enquiry.

3.3. Religions as "cofounders" of the public sphere (Ricoeur)

Like Habermas, Ricoeur gave priority to the exchange between citizens in the informal public sphere, but he additionally took into account that they are drawing on traditions which are its "cofounders." These movements have "enunciative" authority and can appeal to their own and to shared values, motifs that are present because of previous processes of translation in the history of European culture. While the debate between Habermas and Rawls had shown different understandings of "legitimacy" and "justification," Ricoeur added a new dimension: the recognition that the "institutional authority" of the state needs convincing reasons from the "enunciative" side. Religious and other traditions are "cofounders," because they harbored attitudes to institutional power, legitimizing or criticizing it on concrete points: "There is no purely institutional authority without the contribution, the symbolic support, of some enunciative order" (Ricoeur 2007, p.95).

Ricoeur thus opted for a hermeneutical theory of democracy, in the face of two alternatives: mere tradition or contract. In view of the hermeneutical mediatedness of all social formations, he regarded the contract theory as bare, not attentive to the symbolic configurations of the social bond. In its pretense to be able to found a society without presuppositions and to generate a political connectedness ex nihilo, it is compared to the demiurge, a world-creating god whose goodness is uncertain. Politically, it amounts to self-authorization. Similar to

Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde in 1960 and Habermas in his discussion with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2004, Ricoeur in his paper of 1996 pointed out to the pre-political foundations of the state. The fact that religions are among the heterogeneous traditions of cofoundation makes one element even more compelling: that they are driven by their unrealized hopes and their "betrayed promises," leading to renewals and a new projection of their ineffable core, their "fonds mystique," in creative loyalty to their origins. While Habermas viewed cultures as "conventions" in his difference from critical discourse, Ricoeur gave them a different standing, taking them as an enabling symbolic world. Developing their own diversity yet still recognizable, they are assumed to contain an internal dynamic that renews them in their encounter with other intellectual and religious streams to which they relate their heritage. The ability to translate has been a marked feature of religions, making them bridge builders between the symbolic worlds of the scriptures of their origin and their new contexts, giving both of them a new direction, as Ricoeur showed with the translation of the name of Yahwe, "I am who I am" or "I will be there as the one who will be there" in Ex 3:14 in the Septuagint into the language of Greek ontology (Ricoeur 1998, pp.331-361).

4. Conclusion: a "new ethos for Europe" based on translations and "crossed readings"[17]

For both European philosophers, the European project includes, but goes far beyond freedoms of trade, movement, goods, and services, and relies on renewing the motivation to reach a self-understanding beyond purely national terms. Writing his paper shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Ricoeur asked "what new institutions can respond to a political situation without precedent"? (3). As conditions, he discussed in "increasing order of spiritual density" under "models of combining 'identity' and 'alterity'," first translation, then "exchange of memories," and finally "forgiveness" not as "abolishing," but as "shattering the debt." States in Europe have both distinct and shared memories, not least of conflict and suffering. Ricoeur proposed an ethics of memory against remaining "captive in rigid, embalmed, dead traditions" that are commemorated in staged state events: an effort of "plural" and "crossed reading:

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17 Ricoeur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe" (1992), trans. Eileen Brennan in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21 (1995a, pp.3-13).

recounting differently." Beginning with the "wounds of the 'terror of history' (Eliade)," he privileged the "perspective of suffering, not glorious deeds," but remembering first the sufferings "inflicted: start with others before reexamining one's own." This takes Habermas's and Mead's "mutual perspective taking" to a different level, one that includes failings and guilt. A reflective assessment of one's own tradition including its failures gains something that triumphalist commemorations miss: insight into the "unfulfilled future of past forms"

which in Ricoeur's eyes are its "richest part." Religious communities can contribute their resources of "intellectual solidarity" with other movements which are equally called to "release the burden of expectation that subsequent history carried and then betrayed." The undelivered hopes of their own founding memories are an incentive at a time of crisis to strengthen the will to build new institutions and transnational as the required level also from the perspective of subsidiarity to deal with challenges at the global scale.

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